

Original Article

School Cafeteria as a Learning Enterprise: A Mixed-Methods Evaluation of Experiential Learning Outcomes and Financial Sustainability

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Abstract. School cafeterias provide authentic learning environments where students develop professional competencies through real-world operational experiences. This study evaluated the school cafeteria as a learning enterprise by examining experiential learning outcomes and financial sustainability in teacher education using a convergent parallel mixed-methods design. Thirty-eight teacher education students who completed the School Food Service Management course participated in the study. Quantitative data were collected through a validated survey questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics, independent-samples *t*-test, and Pearson correlation, while qualitative data from open-ended responses were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that students demonstrated high levels of competency in food production, managerial skills, entrepreneurial skills, financial literacy, and professional confidence and perceived the School Food Service Management program as highly effective in promoting experiential learning, teamwork, leadership, entrepreneurial preparation, and workplace readiness. No significant differences were found in competency levels between campuses, and no significant relationship was observed between OJT hours rendered and competency development. Financial analysis further indicated that the cafeteria operated as a financially sustainable learning enterprise through positive revenue generation and effective cost management. Qualitative findings showed that students viewed cafeteria operations as challenging yet rewarding, fostering practical skills, teamwork, adaptability, entrepreneurial awareness, and professional growth despite operational constraints. Overall, the findings demonstrate that school cafeterias can function as sustainable learning enterprises that effectively bridge classroom instruction with authentic workplace experiences, thereby strengthening competency development and career readiness in teacher education.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurial education; Experiential learning; Financial sustainability; Learning enterprise; School cafeteria; Teacher education.*

The educational landscape of the twenty-first century increasingly emphasizes experiential learning as a fundamental approach to preparing students for professional practice and industry engagement. Within technical-vocational teacher education, learning extends beyond classroom instruction and requires

students to acquire competencies through authentic, hands-on experiences that simulate real workplace environments. For students enrolled in the Bachelor of Technology and Livelihood Education major in Home Economics (BTLEd-HE), practical exposure is essential in developing food production competencies, managerial abilities, entrepreneurial skills, financial literacy, and professional confidence necessary for careers in education, hospitality, food service, and entrepreneurship. In line with this competency-based approach, the Commission on Higher Education Memorandum Order (CMO) No. 78, series of 2017, emphasizes experiential and industry-aligned learning opportunities that cultivate both technical expertise and workplace readiness among future educators.

Embedded within the BTLEd-HE curriculum is the course School Food Service Management, a three-unit lecture and laboratory subject with a 150-hour practicum component. As stipulated in CMO No. 78, series of 2017, the course focuses on the application of food preparation and service principles in the management of school cafeterias. During the practicum, students actively participate in food production, customer service, inventory control, financial recording, purchasing, and operational supervision, allowing them to translate classroom theories into authentic workplace experiences. Such experiential learning opportunities foster the integration of technical knowledge, managerial competence, and entrepreneurial skills within a real operational setting.

Traditionally, school cafeterias have been regarded merely as facilities that provide food services to students and school personnel. Contemporary educational perspectives, however, recognize their broader function as experiential learning environments where students develop practical competencies through direct participation in business operations. Active involvement in cafeteria management exposes learners to food preparation, inventory management, customer relations, financial management, leadership, teamwork, and decision-making, thereby strengthening their professional competence and workplace readiness through authentic practice.

Existing literature supports the educational value of school cafeteria operations. Studies have shown that effective cafeteria management requires systematic planning, organization, implementation, and supervision to ensure both operational efficiency and meaningful learning experiences (Agustini et al., 2022; Mukti et al., 2022). Likewise, research has demonstrated that sound operational management practices positively influence service quality, customer satisfaction, and organizational effectiveness (Nicodemus & Versano, 2023; Medina et al., 2024; Yago, 2025). These findings suggest that school cafeterias provide structured environments where students can meaningfully engage in managerial and operational responsibilities while applying classroom-acquired knowledge.

The significance of experiential learning is further reinforced within technical-vocational education. Wibowo and Fitriyana (2026) reported that integrating theoretical instruction with laboratory practicum and competency certification significantly enhances students' professional competence and learning effectiveness. Similarly, Nurfatimah et al. (2024) concluded that industry-based learning strengthens culinary students' technical competencies, adaptability, and employability through authentic workplace exposure. These studies highlight the importance of immersive learning experiences in developing career-ready graduates capable of meeting industry demands.

Beyond competency development, financial sustainability remains a critical dimension of successful school cafeteria operations. Sustainable cafeteria management requires effective revenue generation, cost control, budgeting, inventory management, and strategic operational planning. Espejo et al. (2025) emphasized that sound financial management and strategic planning contribute significantly to the sustainability of school canteens, while Peano et al. (2022) and Sucipto et al. (2023) underscored the importance of food safety, efficient resource utilization, and customer-oriented services in maintaining operational effectiveness. These findings reinforce the notion that school cafeterias function not only as instructional laboratories but also as educational enterprises requiring competent financial and managerial stewardship.

Research has likewise demonstrated that well-managed school cafeterias contribute positively to students' experiences and engagement within educational institutions. Healthy food offerings, efficient service systems, and supportive operational practices have been associated with improved student satisfaction and participation (Pajantoy & Ubane, 2022; Kadaryati et al., 2024). Nevertheless, despite the growing body of literature on cafeteria management, customer satisfaction, and operational efficiency, limited research has examined school cafeterias as

experiential learning enterprises within teacher education programs, particularly among BTLEd-HE students across multiple campuses.

Furthermore, existing studies seldom integrate assessments of competency development with evaluations of financial sustainability within a single framework. Variables such as food production competencies, managerial skills, entrepreneurial abilities, financial literacy, professional confidence, operational roles, and workplace readiness remain underexplored in the context of school-based learning enterprises. Consequently, there is a need for a comprehensive investigation that simultaneously examines students' experiential learning outcomes and the financial performance of cafeteria operations.

Addressing this gap, the present study conceptualizes the school cafeteria as an authentic learning enterprise that promotes competency development while operating as a financially sustainable educational venture. Unlike previous investigations that focused primarily on operational performance or customer satisfaction, this study integrates quantitative assessments of students' competencies and program effectiveness with qualitative exploration of their lived experiences across two campuses. By adopting a mixed-methods approach, the study offers a more holistic understanding of experiential learning within technical-vocational teacher education and provides empirical evidence that may inform curriculum enhancement, institutional decision-making, and policy development related to work-integrated learning.

Specifically, the study aims to determine the level of students' competencies in food production, managerial skills, entrepreneurial skills, financial literacy, and professional confidence and work readiness; evaluate the perceived effectiveness of the School Food Service Management program; examine the relationships and differences among selected operational variables; assess the financial performance of cafeteria operations; and explore students' experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, entrepreneurial mindset, and recommendations for program improvement.

Grounded in the principles of mixed-methods research, the study integrates quantitative evidence with qualitative narratives to generate a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. According to Aramide et al. (2023), mixed-methods research enables researchers to combine statistical analysis with participants' lived experiences, producing richer and more contextualized interpretations than either approach alone. Through this methodological integration, the study seeks to provide meaningful insights that may contribute to curriculum innovation, institutional policy formulation, and the sustainable implementation of experiential learning programs in higher education.

Ultimately, this study positions the school cafeteria as more than a food service facility. It conceptualizes the cafeteria as a dynamic experiential learning enterprise where BTLEd-HE students acquire technical competencies, entrepreneurial values, financial management skills, leadership abilities, and professional readiness through authentic operational engagement. In doing so, the study contributes to the growing discourse on competency-based education by demonstrating how school-based enterprises can effectively bridge academic instruction and real-world professional practice while promoting educational and financial sustainability.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, specifically a convergent parallel approach, to evaluate the school cafeteria as a learning enterprise among Bachelor of Technology and Livelihood Education major in Home Economics (BTLEd-HE) students across two campuses. A mixed-methods design was appropriate because it integrated quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of experiential learning outcomes and the financial sustainability of cafeteria operations (Aramide et al., 2023).

The quantitative component utilized a descriptive-comparative-correlational research design to assess students' competencies in food production skills, managerial skills, entrepreneurial skills, financial literacy, and professional confidence and work readiness. It also determined the perceived effectiveness of the School Food Service Management program, assessed the financial performance of the school cafeteria, and examined significant differences and relationships among selected variables, including competency levels, on-the-job training (OJT) exposure, and operational roles.

The qualitative component employed a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of students who participated in cafeteria operations. Through semi-structured interviews, the study gathered in-depth insights regarding the participants' experiences, challenges encountered, coping mechanisms, entrepreneurial mindset, career readiness, and recommendations for improving the implementation of the School Food Service Management program.

The quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated during the interpretation of results to provide a holistic evaluation of the school cafeteria as both an experiential learning environment and a financially sustainable learning enterprise for BTLEd-HE students.

Research Participants

The participants of this study consisted of Bachelor of Technology and Livelihood Education major in Home Economics (BTLEd-HE) students who were enrolled in the School Food Service Management course and had completed their practicum or on-the-job training (OJT) in school cafeteria operations across two campuses. A total of thirty-eight (38) student-participants were included in the study, comprising nine (9) students from the Main Campus and twenty-nine (29) students from the Congressional-Extension Campus.

The study employed a total enumeration sampling technique for the quantitative component, wherein all eligible students who met the established inclusion criteria were invited to participate. The inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) currently enrolled or had completed the School Food Service Management course during the period covered by the study; (2) completed the required 150-hour practicum or OJT in school cafeteria operations; (3) directly participated in cafeteria management and operational activities such as food preparation, customer service, inventory management, purchasing, financial recording, or supervision; and (4) voluntarily agreed to participate by providing informed consent.

Students were excluded from the study if they (1) had not completed the required practicum or OJT hours; (2) had no direct involvement in cafeteria operations; (3) failed to complete the survey questionnaire; or (4) declined or withdrew their consent to participate at any stage of the research.

For the qualitative component, participants were purposively selected from the quantitative respondents based on their direct involvement in cafeteria operations and their willingness to share their experiences. These participants provided in-depth information regarding their experiences, challenges encountered, coping mechanisms, entrepreneurial mindset, career readiness, and recommendations for improving the School Food Service Management program.

The participants' experiences and responses provided valuable insights into how experiential learning through cafeteria operations contributed to competency development, workplace readiness, and entrepreneurial learning among BTLEd-HE students across the two campuses.

Research Instrument

The primary data-gathering instruments for this study were a researcher-developed survey questionnaire and a semi-structured interview guide designed to evaluate the school cafeteria as a learning enterprise among BTLEd-HE students across two campuses.

The quantitative instrument was developed based on an extensive review of related literature, the objectives of the study, and the competencies identified in the School Food Service Management course. The questionnaire consisted of items measuring students' competencies in food production skills, managerial skills, entrepreneurial skills, financial literacy, and professional confidence and work readiness. It also measured the perceived effectiveness of the School Food Service Management program in terms of experiential learning relevance, adequacy of OJT exposure, revenue-sharing motivation, alignment with industry practices, skill application opportunities, teamwork development, leadership development, operational efficiency exposure, entrepreneurial preparation, and overall satisfaction with the program.

Prior to administration, the questionnaire underwent content validation by a panel of experts composed of specialists in Home Economics, Hospitality Management, Technical-Vocational Education, and Educational

Research to ensure the clarity, relevance, and alignment of the instrument with the objectives of the study. The recommendations of the validators were incorporated into the final version of the questionnaire.

To establish reliability, the revised questionnaire was pilot-tested among BTLEd students with characteristics similar to the target respondents but who were excluded from the actual study. The pilot test data were analyzed using Cronbach's alpha reliability analysis, which yielded an overall reliability coefficient of 0.94, indicating excellent internal consistency based on the standards of George and Mallery (2003). This result confirmed that the instrument was reliable for use in the actual data collection.

For the qualitative component, a semi-structured interview guide was utilized to obtain in-depth information regarding the participants' lived experiences in managing the school cafeteria. The interview questions focused on their experiences during cafeteria operations, challenges encountered, coping mechanisms employed, entrepreneurial mindset development, career readiness, and recommendations for improving the implementation of the School Food Service Management program. The semi-structured format allowed flexibility for participants to elaborate on their responses while ensuring that all research objectives were adequately addressed.

In addition to the survey questionnaire and interview guide, financial records and cafeteria operational reports served as documentary sources of data for evaluating gross revenue, operational expenses, net income, profit margin, and cost-control efficiency.

Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to the conduct of the study, formal approval to gather data was obtained from the administrators of the participating campuses. Permission was likewise secured from the respective School Food Service Management instructors and authorized personnel to access cafeteria operational and financial records relevant to the study. After obtaining the necessary approvals, the researcher oriented the participants regarding the objectives of the study, the procedures involved, and their rights as research participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before the administration of the survey questionnaire.

The researcher administered the validated survey questionnaire to the thirty-eight (38) BTLEd-HE students from the Main Campus and Congressional-Extension Campus who had completed the School Food Service Management course and the required cafeteria practicum or OJT. The quantitative data collected included students' competencies, perceived effectiveness of the program, operational exposure, and other variables relevant to the study. Documentary data consisting of cafeteria financial records and operational reports were likewise collected to assess financial performance indicators, including gross revenue, operational expenses, net income, profit margin, and cost-control efficiency.

For the qualitative component, purposively selected participants participated in individual semi-structured interviews to provide deeper insights into their experiences in managing the school cafeteria, the challenges they encountered, their coping mechanisms, entrepreneurial mindset development, career readiness, and recommendations for program improvement. With the participants' permission, the interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and reviewed for accuracy.

The quantitative data were analyzed using appropriate descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, while the qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, significant statements, and emerging themes. Finally, the quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the school cafeteria as a learning enterprise among BTLEd-HE students.

Ethical Considerations

This study strictly adhered to established ethical principles governing research involving human participants. Prior to data collection, permission to conduct the study was obtained from the appropriate university authorities and participating campuses. All participants were informed of the objectives, procedures, benefits, and possible risks of the study before voluntarily signing the informed consent form. They were likewise informed of their right to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or prejudice.

The confidentiality, anonymity, and privacy of all participants were strictly maintained throughout the conduct of the research. Personal identifiers were removed from the survey questionnaires, interview transcripts, and

research database through the use of participant codes to prevent the disclosure of individual identities. Financial records obtained from the school cafeteria were treated as confidential institutional documents and were analyzed only in aggregated form to prevent the disclosure of sensitive financial information.

All hard-copy research documents, including accomplished questionnaires, consent forms, interview notes, and financial records, were stored in a locked cabinet accessible only to the researcher. Electronic files, including encoded survey data, interview transcripts, and digital recordings, were stored in a password-protected computer and encrypted cloud storage to ensure data security. Only the researcher had authorized access to these files throughout the duration of the study.

Upon completion of the research and publication requirements, all digital audio recordings were permanently deleted, while electronic research files will be retained for five (5) years for academic verification purposes before being permanently erased. Printed documents containing identifiable information will be shredded and properly disposed of to ensure that participants' identities and institutional information remain protected. Throughout the conduct of the study, all procedures complied with the provisions of Republic Act No. 10173, otherwise known as the Data Privacy Act of 2012, and with generally accepted ethical standards for educational research.

Results and Discussion

Level of Students' Competencies in School Food Service Management

Table 1. *Level of Students' Competencies in Food Production Skills*

Food Production Skills	Main Campus		Congressional Extension Campus		Overall	
	WM	VI	WM	VI	WM	VI
1. I can consistently follow standardized recipes.	2.89	Agree	3.76	Strongly Agree	3.33	Strongly Agree
2. I apply proper food safety and sanitation practices.	3.22	Agree	3.62	Strongly Agree	3.42	Strongly Agree
3. I can accurately estimate ingredient quantities.	3.00	Agree	3.24	Agree	3.12	Agree
4. I minimize food waste during food preparation.	3.44	Strongly Agree	3.55	Strongly Agree	3.50	Strongly Agree
5. I maintain quality and consistency in food products.	3.22	Agree	3.55	Strongly Agree	3.39	Strongly Agree
	3.15	Agree	3.54	Strongly Agree	3.35	Strongly Agree

Legend: 3.26-4.00 Strongly Agree; 2.51-3.25 Agree; 1.76-2.50 Disagree; 1.00-1.75 Strongly Disagree

Table 1 presents the level of students' competencies in food production skills across the Main Campus and Congressional-Extension Campus. The findings revealed that respondents from the Main Campus obtained an overall weighted mean of 3.15 (Agree), while those from the Congressional-Extension Campus obtained a higher overall weighted mean of 3.54 (Strongly Agree). The combined weighted mean of 3.35 (Strongly Agree) indicates that the participants generally perceived themselves as highly competent in food production skills acquired through the School Food Service Management program and cafeteria operations.

Among the indicators, "I minimize food waste during food preparation" obtained the highest overall weighted mean (3.50, Strongly Agree), suggesting that students developed responsible food preparation practices and an appreciation for efficient resource utilization. Since minimizing food waste directly influences operational costs and sustainability, this result indicates that students were able to apply practical knowledge beyond food preparation alone. In contrast, "I can accurately estimate ingredient quantities" received the lowest weighted mean (3.12, Agree). Although still positively rated, this finding suggests that ingredient estimation remains a developing competency that requires repeated practice because inaccurate portioning may affect product consistency, inventory utilization, and production costs.

While the Congressional-Extension Campus obtained slightly higher ratings than the Main Campus, the present study did not directly investigate differences in the amount or nature of students' operational exposure. Therefore, these differences should not be interpreted as evidence of superior instructional delivery or greater hands-on experience in one campus over the other. Rather, the results indicate that students from both campuses generally perceived themselves as competent in applying food production skills within authentic cafeteria operations.

These findings support Agustini et al. (2022), who emphasized that participation in school cafeteria activities enhances students' practical food preparation competencies through authentic learning experiences. Likewise, Wibowo and Fitriyana (2026) reported that repeated laboratory and operational practice strengthens technical competence in culinary education. The present findings further reinforce these studies by demonstrating that students particularly developed competencies related to food quality, sanitation, and waste minimization, while quantitative estimation of ingredients remains an area that could benefit from additional guided practice.

Table 2. *Level of Students' Competencies in Managerial Skills*

Managerial Skills		Main Campus		Congressional Extension Campus		Overall	
		WM	VI	WM	VI	WM	VI
1.	I can organize and assign tasks efficiently.	2.89	Agree	3.28	Strongly Agree	3.09	Agree
2.	I manage time effectively during operations.	3.00	Agree	3.48	Strongly Agree	3.24	Agree
3.	I can resolve conflicts within the team.	3.00	Agree	3.31	Strongly Agree	3.16	Agree
4.	I supervise workflow effectively.	2.78	Agree	3.24	Agree	3.01	Agree
5.	I make appropriate decisions during operational problems.	3.00	Agree	3.28	Strongly Agree	3.14	Agree
		2.93	Agree	3.31	Strongly Agree	3.13	Agree

Table 2 presents the level of students' competencies in managerial skills across the two campuses. The Main Campus obtained an overall weighted mean of 2.93 (Agree), while the Congressional-Extension Campus obtained 3.31 (Strongly Agree). The combined weighted mean of 3.13 (Agree) indicates that the respondents generally developed satisfactory managerial competencies through their participation in cafeteria operations.

Among the indicators, "I manage time effectively during operations" obtained the highest weighted mean (3.24, Agree), suggesting that the operational demands of cafeteria management required students to prioritize tasks, coordinate activities, and complete responsibilities within limited-service periods. Conversely, "I supervise workflow effectively" received the lowest weighted mean (3.01, Agree). This finding may reflect the nature of student participation in cafeteria operations, where leadership and supervisory responsibilities were often shared among group members or guided by instructors rather than being assigned exclusively to individual students. Consequently, while participants actively contributed to operational activities, they may have had fewer opportunities to independently coordinate personnel, monitor workflow, or make supervisory decisions under real operating conditions.

The results indicate that the School Food Service Management program successfully fostered foundational managerial competencies, particularly in organization, time management, conflict resolution, and operational decision-making. However, the comparatively lower rating for workflow supervision suggests an opportunity to strengthen leadership experiences by assigning more structured supervisory roles during practicum activities. Such exposure would enable students to develop greater confidence in coordinating teams and managing operational processes. These findings are consistent with Nicodemus and Versano (2023), who emphasized that effective cafeteria management requires organizational and supervisory competencies in addition to technical skills. Similarly, Medina et al. (2024) found that participation in operational management activities enhances students' managerial abilities. However, the present findings extend previous research by identifying supervision as a comparatively weaker competency, indicating that leadership experiences should be intentionally strengthened within the practicum component.

Table 3. *Level of Students' Competencies in Entrepreneurial Skills*

Entrepreneurial Skills		Main Campus		Congressional Extension Campus		Overall	
		WM	VI	WM	VI	WM	VI
1.	I understand how to properly price food products.	3.22	Agree	3.48	Strongly Agree	3.35	Strongly Agree
2.	I can identify profitable menu items.	3.44	Strongly Agree	3.62	Strongly Agree	3.53	Strongly Agree
3.	I understand the relationship among cost, revenue, and profit.	3.56	Strongly Agree	3.55	Strongly Agree	3.56	Strongly Agree
4.	I can suggest strategies to improve sales.	3.33	Strongly Agree	3.34	Strongly Agree	3.34	Strongly Agree
5.	I feel capable of starting a small food business.	2.78	Agree	3.28	Strongly Agree	3.03	Agree
		3.27	Strongly Agree	3.46	Strongly Agree	3.36	Strongly Agree

Table 3 presents the level of students' entrepreneurial competencies across the two campuses. The Main Campus obtained an overall weighted mean of 3.27 (Strongly Agree), while the Congressional-Extension Campus obtained 3.46 (Strongly Agree). The overall weighted mean of 3.36 (Strongly Agree) demonstrates that participation in cafeteria operations contributed positively to students' entrepreneurial learning.

The highest-rated indicator was "I understand the relationship among cost, revenue, and profit" (3.56, Strongly Agree), followed closely by "I can identify profitable menu items" (3.53, Strongly Agree). These findings suggest that students gained a strong understanding of fundamental business concepts through direct involvement in cafeteria operations, particularly in pricing, profitability analysis, and menu planning. However, "I feel capable of starting a small food business" obtained the lowest weighted mean (3.03, Agree), indicating that although students acquired entrepreneurial knowledge, they remained less confident about independently establishing and managing their own business.

This distinction is noteworthy because possessing entrepreneurial knowledge does not necessarily translate into entrepreneurial self-efficacy. Students may understand business principles while simultaneously recognizing the financial, managerial, and operational challenges associated with starting a business. Their responses therefore reflect a realistic assessment of entrepreneurial readiness rather than a lack of entrepreneurial competence.

The present findings are consistent with Sucipto et al. (2023), who reported that participation in food service operations enhances students' understanding of business processes and operational decision-making. Likewise, Nurfatimah et al. (2024) found that experiential learning strengthens entrepreneurial competence through authentic workplace experiences. However, unlike Espejo et al. (2025), who emphasized entrepreneurial confidence as an outcome of operational exposure, the present study suggests that confidence in establishing a business develops more gradually than technical entrepreneurial knowledge, highlighting the need for continued mentoring, business planning activities, and enterprise incubation within teacher education programs.

Table 4. *Level of Students' Competencies in Financial Literacy*

Financial Literacy		Main Campus		Congressional Extension Campus		Overall	
		WM	VI	WM	VI	WM	VI
1.	I can accurately record daily sales.	3.33	Strongly Agree	3.38	Strongly Agree	3.36	Strongly Agree
2.	I understand how to compute gross and net income.	3.44	Strongly Agree	3.34	Strongly Agree	3.39	Strongly Agree
3.	I can effectively monitor operational expenses.	3.11	Agree	3.38	Strongly Agree	3.25	Agree
4.	I understand how the revolving fund system operates.	3.33	Strongly Agree	3.48	Strongly Agree	3.41	Strongly Agree
5.	I can interpret basic financial reports.	3.00	Agree	3.38	Strongly Agree	3.19	Agree
		3.24	Agree	3.39	Strongly Agree	3.32	Strongly Agree

Table 4 presents the level of students' financial literacy competencies across the two campuses. The Main Campus obtained an overall weighted mean of 3.24 (Agree), while the Congressional-Extension Campus obtained 3.39 (Strongly Agree). The overall weighted mean of 3.32 (Strongly Agree) indicates that the participants generally developed strong financial competencies through their involvement in cafeteria operations.

Among the indicators, "I understand how the revolving fund system operates" received the highest weighted mean (3.41, Strongly Agree), followed by "I understand how to compute gross and net income" (3.39, Strongly Agree). These findings suggest that students developed practical knowledge of financial management through authentic exposure to daily cafeteria operations. In contrast, "I can interpret basic financial reports" obtained the lowest weighted mean (3.19, Agree), indicating that while students were comfortable performing routine financial tasks, interpreting formal financial statements remained relatively more challenging.

Although the Congressional-Extension Campus recorded slightly higher financial literacy scores than the Main Campus, the study did not examine differences in the allocation of financial responsibilities or the extent of students' exposure to accounting-related tasks across campuses. Therefore, the observed variation should be interpreted cautiously and should not be attributed to differences in curriculum implementation. Instead, the

findings indicate that students across both campuses generally acquired applied financial competencies through participation in cafeteria operations.

The results support Espejo et al. (2025), who emphasized that active participation in revenue monitoring and financial management strengthens financial decision-making skills. Similarly, Sucipto et al. (2023) highlighted the importance of financial oversight in sustaining cafeteria operations. The present study further demonstrates that while students readily learned operational financial procedures, interpreting formal financial reports remains an area where additional instructional support may be beneficial.

Table 5. *Level of Students' Competencies in Professional Confidence and Work Readiness*

Professional Confidence and Work Readiness		Main Campus		Congressional Extension Campus		Overall	
		WM	VI	WM	VI	WM	VI
1.	The cafeteria experience improved my confidence.	3.00	Agree	3.76	Strongly Agree	3.38	Strongly Agree
2.	I feel prepared for real workplace settings.	2.89	Agree	3.45	Strongly Agree	3.17	Agree
3.	I developed leadership skills through the program.	3.00	Agree	3.34	Strongly Agree	3.17	Agree
4.	I improved my communication skills.	3.44	Strongly Agree	3.45	Strongly Agree	3.45	Strongly Agree
5.	I can effectively handle pressure in a work environment.	3.22	Agree	3.52	Strongly Agree	3.37	Strongly Agree
		3.11	Agree	3.50	Strongly Agree	3.31	Strongly Agree

Table 5 presents the level of students' professional confidence and work readiness across the two campuses. The Main Campus obtained an overall weighted mean of 3.11 (Agree), while the Congressional-Extension Campus obtained 3.50 (Strongly Agree). The combined weighted mean of 3.31 (Strongly Agree) indicates that the School Food Service Management program contributed positively to students' professional development and workplace preparedness.

Among the indicators, "I improved my communication skills" obtained the highest weighted mean (3.45, Strongly Agree), demonstrating that continuous interaction with customers, classmates, and supervisors strengthened students' interpersonal communication. Likewise, "The cafeteria experience improved my confidence" received a high rating (3.38, Strongly Agree), reflecting the value of authentic workplace experiences in developing self-confidence. However, "I feel prepared for real workplace settings" and "I developed leadership skills through the program" both received the lowest weighted mean (3.17, Agree). Although these ratings remain positive, they suggest that students perceived room for improvement in assuming leadership responsibilities and transitioning confidently into actual workplace environments.

These findings indicate that while the program effectively developed communication skills and professional confidence, opportunities for structured leadership experiences and greater exposure to industry-standard workplace practices could further strengthen students' readiness for future employment. Providing rotational leadership assignments, increased supervisory responsibilities, and stronger engagement with industry partners may enhance students' preparedness for professional roles beyond the university setting.

The findings are consistent with Wibowo and Fitriyana (2026), who reported that competency-based experiential learning improves workplace readiness through authentic practice. Similarly, Nurfatimah et al. (2024) found that industry-based learning enhances adaptability and employability. However, the present study adds that communication skills may develop more rapidly than leadership confidence, emphasizing the importance of intentionally designing learning experiences that cultivate both technical competence and leadership capability among future Technology and Livelihood Education teachers.

Perceived Effectiveness of the School Food Service Management Program

Table 6 presents the students' perceived effectiveness of the School Food Service Management program in terms of experiential learning relevance, adequacy of OJT exposure, revenue-sharing motivation, alignment with industry practices, skill application opportunities, teamwork development, leadership development, operational efficiency exposure, entrepreneurial preparation, and overall satisfaction with the program. The findings revealed that the Main Campus obtained an overall weighted mean of 3.41 (Very High), while the Congressional-Extension

Campus obtained 3.34 (Very High). The overall weighted mean of 3.38 (Very High) indicates that students regarded the program as highly effective in providing meaningful experiential learning opportunities and authentic operational experiences.

Table 6. *The Perceived Effectiveness of the School Food Service Management Program*

School Food Service Management		Main Campus		Congressional Extension Campus		Overall	
Program Variables		WM	VI	WM	VI	WM	VI
1.	Experiential learning relevance	3.00	High	2.72	High	2.86	High
2.	Adequacy of OJT exposure	3.00	High	3.41	Very High	3.21	High
3.	Revenue-sharing motivation	3.44	Very High	3.34	Very High	3.39	Very High
4.	Alignment with industry practices	3.44	Very High	3.31	Very High	3.38	Very High
5.	Skill application opportunities	3.44	Very High	3.38	Very High	3.41	Very High
6.	Teamwork development	3.78	Very High	3.45	Very High	3.62	Very High
7.	Leadership development	3.78	Very High	3.48	Very High	3.63	Very High
8.	Operational efficiency exposure	3.67	Very High	3.45	Very High	3.56	Very High
9.	Entrepreneurial preparation	3.33	Very High	3.45	Very High	3.39	Very High
10.	Overall satisfaction with the program?	3.22	High	3.45	Very High	3.34	Very High
		3.41	Very High	3.34	Very High	3.38	Very High

Among the program dimensions, Leadership Development (WM = 3.63) and Teamwork Development (WM = 3.62) obtained the highest ratings. These findings suggest that managing the school cafeteria required students to work collaboratively, coordinate responsibilities, and make operational decisions, thereby strengthening interpersonal and leadership competencies. Likewise, the high rating for Operational Efficiency Exposure (WM = 3.56) indicates that students were exposed to authentic work processes that simulated actual food service operations.

Conversely, Experiential Learning Relevance received the lowest weighted mean (2.86, High). Although still positively evaluated, this comparatively lower rating suggests that some students may have perceived a gap between classroom instruction and the practical realities encountered during cafeteria operations. Rather than questioning the value of experiential learning itself, this finding may indicate that students expected stronger integration between theoretical discussions and real-time operational decision-making, particularly in areas such as financial management, customer relations, and business problem-solving. Strengthening reflective activities, structured debriefing sessions, and explicit connections between classroom concepts and operational experiences may therefore enhance students' perception of the program's experiential relevance.

These findings support Nurfatimah et al. (2024), who emphasized that industry-based learning promotes competency development when classroom instruction and authentic workplace experiences are intentionally integrated. Likewise, Wibowo and Fitriyana (2026) reported that competency-based practicum experiences improve students' professional development. The present study extends these findings by demonstrating that while students highly valued leadership, teamwork, and operational learning, greater emphasis should be placed on helping learners explicitly connect theoretical knowledge with workplace practice throughout the learning process.

Difference in the Competency Levels of Students Across Two Campuses

Table 7. *Significant Difference in the Competency Levels of Students from Two Campuses*

Campus	N	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value	Interpretation
Main Campus	9	3.14	0.42	1.78	0.099	Not Significant
Congressional Extension Campus	29	3.43	0.42			

Table 7 presents the comparison of students' competency levels between the Main Campus and the Congressional-Extension Campus. The Main Campus obtained a mean competency score of 3.14 (SD = 0.42), while the Congressional-Extension Campus obtained a slightly higher mean score of 3.43 (SD = 0.42). Despite this numerical difference, the computed t-value of 1.78 and p-value of 0.099 indicate that the difference was not statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

The findings indicate that students from both campuses achieved comparable competency levels in food production, managerial skills, entrepreneurial skills, financial literacy, and professional confidence. Although descriptive statistics showed slightly higher ratings in the Congressional-Extension Campus, the absence of

statistical significance suggests that these variations were within the range of normal sampling variability rather than reflecting meaningful institutional differences.

From an institutional perspective, this finding suggests that the School Food Service Management program was implemented with sufficient consistency across campuses to produce relatively equivalent learning outcomes. The comparable competency levels imply that students were provided with similar opportunities to acquire practical knowledge and operational experience despite differences in campus location or operational context. This consistency is important because it demonstrates that decentralized program implementation did not compromise the quality of competency development among students.

The findings support Wibowo and Fitriyana (2026), who reported that competency-based experiential learning can produce comparable learning outcomes across different instructional settings when common learning objectives and authentic operational experiences are maintained. Likewise, Nurfatimah et al. (2024) emphasized that industry-based learning environments promote competency development regardless of institutional context, provided that students actively participate in authentic workplace activities.

Relationship Between Operational Exposure and Competency Development

Table 8. *Relationship Between OJT Hours Rendered and Competency Levels*

Variables	Pearson r	p-value	Interpretation
OJT Hours Rendered and Competency Levels	0.16	0.339	Not Significant

Table 8 presents the relationship between the number of OJT hours rendered and students' competency levels. The computed Pearson correlation coefficient ($r = 0.16$) indicates a very weak positive relationship between the two variables. However, the computed p-value of 0.339 exceeds the 0.05 level of significance, indicating that the relationship was not statistically significant.

These findings indicate that increasing the number of practicum hours alone did not necessarily result in higher competency levels among the participants. A plausible explanation is that nearly all respondents completed the required 150-hour practicum, resulting in limited variability in training duration. Consequently, differences in competency development were more likely associated with the quality of students' learning experiences, the diversity of operational tasks performed, the degree of responsibility assigned, and the level of supervision received rather than the total number of hours completed.

This finding reinforces the growing body of literature suggesting that meaningful experiential learning depends more on the richness and authenticity of workplace experiences than on the duration of exposure alone. Within competency-based education, students develop professional competencies most effectively when they actively perform authentic tasks, receive constructive feedback, and engage in reflective practice throughout the learning process rather than merely accumulating training hours.

The present findings are consistent with Wibowo and Fitriyana (2026), who emphasized that competency development depends on the effectiveness of practical learning experiences rather than training duration alone. Likewise, Nurfatimah et al. (2024) reported that authentic workplace engagement and active participation in operational activities contribute more substantially to students' professional competence than the amount of time spent in practicum settings.

Table 9. *Difference in Competency Levels According to Assigned Operational Roles*

Operational Role	n	Mean Competency	F-value	p-value	Interpretation
Cashier	8	3.47	0.633	0.676	Not Significant
Food Preparation	18	3.27			
Inventory Management	4	3.21			
Marketing	5	3.57			
Purchasing	1	3.64			
Supervisor/Leader	2	3.37			

Note: Interpret the Purchasing group with caution because it consisted of only one participant.

Table 9 presents the comparison of students' competency levels according to their assigned operational roles during cafeteria operations. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine whether

competency levels significantly differed among students assigned as cashier, food preparation personnel, inventory managers, marketing personnel, purchasing personnel, and supervisors or leaders. Although Purchasing obtained the highest mean competency score ($M = 3.64$), followed by Marketing ($M = 3.57$) and Cashier ($M = 3.47$), the computed F-value of 0.633 with a p-value of 0.676 indicates that these differences were not statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

The findings suggest that students developed comparable competency levels regardless of their assigned operational responsibilities. While each role emphasized different operational tasks, all participants were exposed to authentic learning experiences that required the application of food production, managerial, entrepreneurial, financial, and professional competencies. Consequently, no single operational role appeared to provide a significant advantage in overall competency development.

From an educational perspective, this finding indicates that the School Food Service Management program successfully provided meaningful experiential learning opportunities across various operational assignments. Whether students were assigned to food preparation, cashiering, inventory management, marketing, purchasing, or supervisory roles, each responsibility contributed to the development of competencies necessary for future Technology and Livelihood Education professionals. This supports the principles of experiential learning, which emphasize that meaningful learning results from active engagement in authentic tasks rather than from a specific job assignment alone.

The findings are consistent with Medina et al. (2024), who reported that active participation in school cafeteria operations enhances students' practical competencies regardless of specific operational assignments. Likewise, Sucipto et al. (2023) emphasized that authentic participation across different operational functions contributes to students' understanding of food service management as an integrated system rather than as isolated job responsibilities.

Financial Performance of the School Cafeteria

Table 10. *Financial Performance of the School Cafeteria*

Campus	Gross Revenue	Operational Expenses	Net Income	Profit Margin	Cost Ratio	Interpretation
Main Campus	74,430.00	45,258.00	30,172.00	40.54%	60.81%	Financially Sustainable
Congressional Extension Campus	66,500.00	39,900.00	26,600.00	40.00%	60.00%	Financially Sustainable

Table 10 presents the financial performance of the school cafeterias in terms of gross revenue, operational expenses, net income, profit margin, and operating cost ratio across the two campuses. The Main Campus generated a gross revenue of ₱74,430.00, incurred operational expenses of ₱45,258.00, and realized a net income of ₱30,172.00, resulting in a 40.54% profit margin and a 60.81% operating cost ratio. Similarly, the Congressional-Extension Campus generated ₱66,500.00 in gross revenue, recorded ₱39,900.00 in operational expenses, and obtained a net income of ₱26,600.00, corresponding to a 40.00% profit margin and a 60.00% operating cost ratio.

The comparable financial indicators suggest that both cafeterias generated positive operating returns while maintaining operational expenses at approximately 60% of total revenue. Although the financial outcomes were similar, this should not be interpreted to mean that both campuses operated under identical conditions. Rather, the percentages represent standardized financial indicators derived from each campus's revenue and expense records, allowing comparison despite differences in total sales and expenditures.

These findings indicate that the school cafeteria functioned not only as a venue for experiential learning but also as a financially viable learning enterprise. The positive net income generated by both campuses demonstrates that students were exposed to authentic financial management practices, including budgeting, expense monitoring, revenue generation, and cost control. Such experiences provided meaningful opportunities to apply classroom concepts in actual operational settings while contributing to the sustainability of cafeteria operations.

The findings are consistent with Espejo et al. (2025), who emphasized that effective revenue management and financial planning are fundamental to sustaining school food service operations. Similarly, Sucipto et al. (2023)

reported that careful monitoring of revenues and operational costs contributes to both organizational sustainability and students' practical understanding of business management. The present findings further demonstrate that financially sustainable cafeteria operations can simultaneously function as authentic learning laboratories where students develop entrepreneurial and financial competencies through real-world practice.

Students' Experiences in Managing the School Cafeteria

The participants described their experiences in managing the school cafeteria as both demanding and transformative. Although they encountered operational challenges, physical fatigue, and workplace pressures, they consistently perceived the experience as a meaningful component of their professional preparation. Thematic analysis revealed four interrelated themes: (1) Experiential and Real-World Learning Exposure, (2) Development of Practical and Interpersonal Skills, (3) Operational Stress and Challenges, and (4) Personal Growth and Responsibility Development.

Theme 1. Experiential and Real-World Learning Exposure

The participants consistently described the school cafeteria as an authentic learning environment that enabled them to experience the realities of food service management beyond classroom instruction. Rather than merely applying isolated technical skills, students were immersed in actual operational processes, including food preparation, customer service, budgeting, purchasing, inventory management, and decision-making. This immersion allowed them to appreciate the complexity of operating a food service enterprise while understanding the interdependence of managerial, financial, and interpersonal responsibilities.

The findings illustrate the principles of Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, wherein meaningful learning occurs through a continuous cycle of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. The cafeteria operations provided students with concrete experiences by engaging them in authentic workplace tasks. Through reflection on operational successes and challenges, students refined their understanding of food service management and subsequently applied these insights to improve their performance during succeeding operations. Thus, learning extended beyond technical competence to include professional judgment and adaptive decision-making.

Unlike simulated laboratory activities, the cafeteria required students to respond to unpredictable customer demands, manage limited resources, and perform under time constraints. These authentic workplace conditions encouraged students to integrate theoretical knowledge acquired in the School Food Service Management course with practical decision-making, thereby narrowing the gap between academic preparation and professional practice. This finding complements the quantitative results presented in Table 6, where students expressed high levels of satisfaction with the experiential nature of the program, suggesting that authentic operational exposure substantially contributed to their perceived learning outcomes.

The findings support Nurfatimah et al. (2024), who emphasized that authentic industry-based experiences enhance students' workplace preparedness by allowing them to contextualize theoretical concepts within actual professional settings. Similarly, Wibowo and Fitriyana (2026) argued that competency development is strengthened when students actively participate in real operational environments requiring continuous reflection and adaptation. The present findings therefore suggest that the school cafeteria functioned not merely as a food service facility but as a structured experiential learning laboratory that facilitated the development of higher-order professional competencies essential for future Technology and Livelihood Education teachers.

Theme 2. Development of Practical and Interpersonal Skills

Beyond acquiring technical competencies, participants emphasized that cafeteria operations cultivated practical and interpersonal skills necessary for both professional practice and teacher preparation. Students identified improvements in communication, teamwork, financial management, customer service, problem-solving, discipline, and time management as significant outcomes of their participation. These competencies emerged through daily interactions with customers, classmates, and faculty supervisors, requiring students to coordinate responsibilities while maintaining service quality under operational constraints.

For BTLEd-Home Economics students, these competencies extend beyond the immediate context of cafeteria management. Effective communication, collaborative work, leadership, and organizational skills are fundamental attributes expected of future Technology and Livelihood Education teachers who will eventually manage

laboratory classes, supervise practical activities, facilitate entrepreneurship projects, and coordinate school-based learning enterprises. Consequently, the cafeteria experience contributed not only to operational competence but also to the development of professional capabilities directly relevant to their future teaching responsibilities.

Participants' emphasis on discipline and time management also reflects the importance of self-regulation in experiential learning environments. Unlike conventional classroom activities, cafeteria operations required students to prioritize multiple tasks simultaneously, allocate responsibilities efficiently, and respond promptly to changing operational demands. These experiences fostered professional habits associated with accountability, reliability, and effective classroom management, which are critical competencies for educators responsible for supervising learners in practical learning environments.

The qualitative findings reinforce the quantitative results presented in Table 5, where students demonstrated high levels of managerial competence and professional confidence. While the quantitative findings indicated strong competency development, the participants' narratives explain how these competencies were acquired through repeated engagement in authentic operational tasks requiring communication, collaboration, and independent decision-making. Medina et al. (2024) similarly reported that operational participation in school-based enterprises promotes both technical competence and essential employability skills, thereby preparing students for professional responsibilities beyond the immediate learning context.

Theme 3. Operational Stress and Challenges

Although participants generally valued the cafeteria experience, they also identified substantial operational challenges that influenced their learning experiences. Students described physical exhaustion, heavy workloads, time pressure, inadequate facilities, and insufficient supervision during actual operations. Rather than representing isolated inconveniences, these issues reveal institutional conditions that may affect both the quality of experiential learning and the safety of students participating in food service operations.

Particularly noteworthy was the participants' concern regarding the lack of adequate operational guidance during cafeteria activities. Experiential learning does not imply independent learning without appropriate supervision. Instead, meaningful experiential learning requires structured mentoring that enables students to perform authentic tasks while receiving timely feedback and professional guidance. Insufficient supervision may increase operational errors, reduce learning opportunities, and expose students to unnecessary occupational and food safety risks, especially in food preparation environments where proper sanitation and handling procedures are essential.

Similarly, the reported absence of basic operational facilities, including accessible sinks and adequate workspaces, extends beyond issues of convenience. Such deficiencies may compromise compliance with fundamental food safety and sanitation standards while increasing physical strain among students responsible for preparing and serving food. These findings underscore the importance of providing appropriate institutional support to ensure that experiential learning environments remain both educationally effective and operationally safe.

Despite these challenges, participants continued to describe the cafeteria experience as worthwhile, suggesting that operational difficulties became opportunities for problem-solving, adaptability, and collaborative decision-making. Nevertheless, these findings should not be interpreted as justification for maintaining inadequate learning conditions. Instead, they highlight specific institutional areas requiring improvement to maximize learning outcomes while safeguarding student welfare. This interpretation aligns with Sucipto et al. (2023), who emphasized that effective experiential learning in food service management depends not only on authentic operational exposure but also on adequate facilities, supervision, and organizational support that enable students to learn safely and effectively.

Theme 4. Personal Growth and Responsibility Development

Beyond technical competence and interpersonal skill development, participants consistently described the cafeteria experience as a catalyst for personal and professional transformation. Students reported becoming more responsible, adaptable, disciplined, and confident as they gradually assumed ownership of operational responsibilities and became accountable for the quality of their work. These narratives reflect the development of professional identity rather than merely the acquisition of additional skills.

Unlike Theme 2, which focuses on competency development, this theme highlights the internal changes that occurred as students engaged in authentic workplace responsibilities. Participants described how repeated exposure to operational demands fostered greater self-confidence, resilience, and accountability while strengthening their commitment to fulfilling assigned roles. Such experiences encouraged students to recognize the consequences of their decisions, appreciate the importance of reliability, and develop a stronger sense of professional responsibility.

These findings are consistent with experiential learning theory, which proposes that authentic experiences facilitate not only cognitive development but also changes in learners' attitudes, values, and professional identities. As students reflected on both successful and challenging operational situations, they developed greater confidence in their ability to manage responsibilities while cultivating attitudes associated with professionalism and lifelong learning.

The qualitative findings complement the quantitative results presented in Table 5, where professional confidence and workplace readiness received high ratings. Participants' narratives explain that confidence was not acquired simply through classroom instruction but emerged gradually through repeated engagement in authentic operational tasks that required accountability, adaptability, and reflective practice. Wibowo and Fitriyana (2026) similarly argued that competency-based experiential learning contributes to the formation of professional identity by encouraging students to internalize workplace values, ethical responsibility, and continuous self-improvement. Accordingly, the School Food Service Management program contributed not only to competency acquisition but also to preparing future BTLED graduates to assume professional responsibilities as Technology and Livelihood Education educators capable of leading practical learning environments with confidence and accountability.

Challenges and Coping Mechanisms During Cafeteria Operations

The participants identified a range of operational, academic, physical, and interpersonal challenges while managing the school cafeteria. Despite these constraints, they demonstrated adaptive strategies that enabled them to sustain cafeteria operations and fulfill their academic responsibilities. Four themes emerged from the analysis: (1) Time Management and Scheduling Conflicts, (2) Lack of Facilities, Equipment, and Operational Resources, (3) Operational Pressure and Workload Challenges, and (4) Teamwork, Communication, and Adaptability as Coping Mechanisms.

Theme 5. Time Management and Scheduling Conflicts

Balancing academic responsibilities with cafeteria operations emerged as one of the most significant challenges experienced by the participants. Students described difficulties in meeting operational requirements while simultaneously attending classes, completing coursework, and complying with the required duty hours. Rather than simply reflecting a shortage of time, these experiences illustrate the complexity of managing multiple academic and operational responsibilities within a limited schedule.

The participants' narratives further revealed that students adopted several self-regulatory strategies to cope with these competing demands. These included prioritizing daily tasks, adjusting personal schedules, coordinating responsibilities with teammates, preparing ingredients in advance whenever possible, and allocating responsibilities according to individual availability. Such strategies enabled students to maximize limited preparation time while minimizing disruptions to their academic obligations. These adaptive behaviors demonstrate that time management extended beyond individual discipline and became a collaborative process requiring continuous communication and shared responsibility among team members.

For teacher education students, the ability to organize multiple responsibilities is particularly important because future Technology and Livelihood Education teachers are expected to manage laboratory classes, supervise student projects, coordinate school activities, and simultaneously fulfill instructional, administrative, and community extension responsibilities. Consequently, the scheduling challenges encountered during cafeteria operations provided authentic opportunities to develop organizational and planning competencies directly transferable to their future professional practice.

The findings complement the quantitative results presented in Table 5, where managerial competence received relatively high ratings, suggesting that students developed organizational skills through repeated engagement in authentic operational situations. Medina et al. (2024) similarly emphasized that participation in school-based

enterprises strengthens students' planning, coordination, and time management competencies by exposing them to realistic operational demands that require continuous prioritization and collaborative decision-making.

Theme 6. Lack of Facilities, Equipment, and Operational Resources

Participants consistently identified inadequate facilities, insufficient equipment, and limited operational resources as major barriers to effective cafeteria management. Their experiences extended beyond inconvenience and pointed to institutional conditions that directly affected operational efficiency, student safety, and the overall quality of experiential learning.

The absence of accessible sinks, dedicated kitchens, adequate storage facilities, reliable water supply, and complete food preparation equipment created operational inefficiencies while increasing the physical demands placed upon students. More importantly, these deficiencies have implications for compliance with fundamental food safety and sanitation standards. Limited access to running water may hinder proper handwashing and utensil sanitation, while inadequate refrigeration and storage facilities increase the risk of food spoilage and compromise food quality. These concerns extend beyond operational challenges and represent important institutional issues that require immediate attention to ensure safe and effective learning environments.

From an educational perspective, experiential learning should replicate authentic professional practice while maintaining conditions consistent with industry standards. When essential facilities and equipment are unavailable, students may develop adaptive problem-solving skills; however, they may also become accustomed to operational practices that do not fully align with accepted food safety protocols. Consequently, improving operational facilities is not merely an infrastructural concern but an educational investment that supports competency development, regulatory compliance, and student welfare.

The findings reinforce the quantitative results presented in Table 10, which demonstrated that both campuses maintained positive financial performance. While the cafeteria generated sufficient revenue to sustain operations, participants' recommendations suggest that future financial planning should prioritize reinvestment in facilities and operational resources that directly enhance both learning quality and food safety. Consistent with Sucipto et al. (2023), sustainable school cafeteria operations require adequate infrastructure, appropriate equipment, and systematic resource management to support both operational efficiency and meaningful experiential learning.

Theme 7. Operational Pressure and Workload Challenges

Participants described cafeteria operations as physically demanding and emotionally stressful, particularly during peak service periods characterized by high customer demand, limited preparation time, and continuous multitasking. Students reported fatigue, pressure to maintain service quality, and concerns about committing operational mistakes while simultaneously fulfilling multiple responsibilities.

Rather than viewing these experiences solely as negative outcomes, the findings illustrate the realities of working in fast-paced food service environments where operational efficiency must be maintained despite fluctuating customer volume and limited resources. Exposure to these conditions enabled students to appreciate the importance of composure, prioritization, and rapid decision-making under pressure. Nevertheless, sustained physical exhaustion and excessive workload should not be considered inherent requirements of experiential learning. Instead, they highlight the importance of designing learning experiences that balance authentic workplace exposure with appropriate workload distribution and institutional support.

The participants' narratives also demonstrate the development of resilience through repeated engagement with operational challenges. Students learned to regulate emotional responses, remain task-focused during demanding situations, and continue providing quality service despite physical fatigue. These experiences reflect the development of occupational resilience, which has been recognized as an essential competency in hospitality and food service education because professionals are frequently required to perform effectively under conditions of time pressure, customer expectations, and operational uncertainty.

The findings are consistent with hospitality education literature emphasizing that controlled exposure to operational stress contributes to professional preparedness by enhancing adaptability, emotional regulation, and problem-solving abilities. However, resilience should emerge from well-supported learning experiences rather than from avoidable institutional constraints. Accordingly, experiential learning programs should incorporate

mechanisms for workload monitoring, scheduled rest periods, and faculty mentoring to ensure that operational challenges promote professional growth without compromising students' well-being.

Theme 8. Teamwork, Communication, and Adaptability as Coping Mechanisms

Despite the numerous operational challenges encountered during cafeteria management, participants consistently identified teamwork, effective communication, and adaptability as the primary mechanisms that enabled them to sustain daily operations. Rather than functioning as isolated interpersonal skills, these competencies operated collectively as collaborative coping strategies that allowed students to respond effectively to unexpected operational situations.

Participants described how continuous communication facilitated task coordination, rapid problem-solving, and efficient redistribution of responsibilities during periods of high customer demand or staff shortages. Students adapted by assisting classmates beyond their assigned roles, adjusting work assignments according to immediate operational needs, and maintaining open communication to minimize errors and service interruptions. These adaptive behaviors demonstrate that successful cafeteria management depended not only on individual competence but also on the collective capacity of the team to coordinate decisions and respond to changing circumstances.

Unlike Theme 2, which focused on the development of communication and teamwork as professional competencies, this theme emphasizes their functional role in helping students manage operational adversity. Collaboration therefore became an adaptive mechanism that reduced workplace stress, improved operational continuity, and strengthened students' confidence in managing complex situations collectively. Such findings underscore the importance of fostering collaborative learning environments where students learn to negotiate responsibilities, support one another, and solve problems through shared decision-making.

The findings also have important implications for teacher education. Future Technology and Livelihood Education teachers are expected to collaborate with colleagues, supervise student groups, coordinate school projects, and engage with multiple stakeholders within educational institutions. Consequently, the collaborative coping strategies demonstrated during cafeteria operations represent valuable professional experiences that extend beyond food service management and contribute to the development of effective educational leadership and collaborative practice.

The qualitative findings further explain the quantitative results presented in Table 5, where teamwork and professional confidence received high ratings. While the quantitative findings confirmed strong competency development, the participants' narratives illustrate that these competencies were cultivated through continuous collaboration under authentic operational conditions rather than through individual performance alone. Consistent with Agustini et al. (2022) and Wibowo and Fitriyana (2026), experiential learning environments strengthen students' capacity to communicate effectively, adapt to changing workplace conditions, and solve operational problems collaboratively, thereby preparing them for the interpersonal demands of professional practice.

Influence of Cafeteria Participation on Entrepreneurial Mindset and Career Readiness

The participants consistently described the School Food Service Management program as an important learning experience that shaped their entrepreneurial perspectives and professional preparedness. Through direct involvement in cafeteria operations, students gained practical exposure to business management, customer relations, financial decision-making, and workplace responsibilities. Thematic analysis generated four major themes: (1) Development of Entrepreneurial Knowledge and Business Awareness, (2) Enhancement of Workplace Readiness and Professional Skills, (3) Realization of the Realities and Challenges of Business Operations, and (4) Increased Motivation and Confidence Toward Entrepreneurship.

Theme 9. Development of Entrepreneurial Knowledge and Business Awareness

Participants consistently reported that cafeteria participation broadened their understanding of business management by allowing them to apply concepts related to budgeting, inventory management, pricing, customer service, and profit generation in authentic operational settings. Rather than introducing entirely new concepts, the cafeteria experience enabled students to contextualize theoretical knowledge previously acquired through classroom instruction and prerequisite entrepreneurship-related courses. The integration of theoretical instruction

with authentic operational experience strengthened students' understanding of how business principles function in actual practice.

The findings illustrate the complementary relationship between formal instruction and experiential learning. Classroom discussions provided students with foundational knowledge of entrepreneurship, financial management, and operational planning, while cafeteria participation allowed them to test, refine, and evaluate these concepts through direct experience. This interaction between theory and practice reflects the central principle of experiential learning, wherein knowledge is continuously constructed through active engagement and reflective application rather than through classroom instruction alone.

Students also developed a broader appreciation of entrepreneurial decision-making by recognizing that business success depends not only on profitability but also on customer satisfaction, quality assurance, inventory control, and effective resource management. These experiences encouraged participants to view entrepreneurship as a dynamic process requiring continuous planning, evaluation, and adaptation rather than merely generating financial returns.

The qualitative findings complement the quantitative results presented in Table 3, where Entrepreneurial Skills received high competency ratings. While the survey results demonstrated that students perceived themselves as knowledgeable about entrepreneurial concepts, the participants' narratives explain how these competencies were reinforced through authentic business operations that connected classroom theories with actual managerial practice. These findings support Espejo et al. (2025), who emphasized that experiential business activities strengthen entrepreneurial understanding by allowing students to apply financial and operational principles within realistic contexts. Similarly, Sucipto et al. (2023) argued that school-based enterprises provide meaningful opportunities for learners to develop entrepreneurial thinking through practical engagement with business operations.

Theme 10. Enhancement of Workplace Readiness and Professional Skills

Participants consistently described the cafeteria experience as an important contributor to their professional preparation by exposing them to workplace expectations, operational responsibilities, and interpersonal interactions commonly encountered in professional environments. Students emphasized improvements in communication, customer service, leadership, adaptability, financial accountability, and problem-solving, all of which are competencies expected of graduates entering the teaching profession and related educational fields.

For BTLEd-Home Economics students, workplace readiness extends beyond employability in food service establishments. As future Technology and Livelihood Education teachers, they are expected to supervise laboratory classes, facilitate entrepreneurship projects, manage learning enterprises, coordinate school-based activities, and model professional behavior for their future learners. The cafeteria therefore functioned as a training environment where students practiced organizational leadership, resource management, and interpersonal communication under authentic operational conditions closely resembling the responsibilities they will encounter as educators.

Participants also emphasized learning to work under pressure while maintaining service quality and fulfilling assigned responsibilities. These experiences contributed to the development of professional confidence and workplace behaviors associated with accountability, initiative, and ethical responsibility. Such competencies are particularly valuable in teacher education because educators frequently perform multiple instructional, managerial, and administrative functions that require effective decision-making and collaborative leadership.

The findings reinforce the quantitative results presented in Table 5, where Professional Confidence and Workplace Readiness received high ratings across both campuses. The qualitative narratives explain that this confidence developed through repeated exposure to authentic workplace situations rather than through theoretical instruction alone. Consistent with Wibowo and Fitriyana (2026) and Nurfatimah et al. (2024), competency-based experiential learning prepares students for professional practice by allowing them to demonstrate technical competence while simultaneously developing the interpersonal and organizational capabilities required in real working environments.

Theme 11. Realization of the Realities and Challenges of Business Operations

Beyond developing entrepreneurial knowledge, participants emphasized that cafeteria management exposed them to the realities of operating a business under authentic conditions. Students recognized that successful business management requires continuous decision-making, accountability, creativity, customer satisfaction, and effective resource utilization. Their experiences revealed that entrepreneurship involves balancing financial sustainability with operational efficiency while responding to constantly changing customer needs and workplace challenges.

A particularly important finding was the participants' recognition of accountability in operational decision-making. Students acknowledged that every decision—whether related to purchasing, pricing, inventory management, food preparation, or customer service—had direct consequences for the overall success of cafeteria operations. This realization reflects an important dimension of entrepreneurial learning because students moved beyond understanding business procedures toward appreciating the ethical and managerial responsibilities associated with leading an enterprise.

Participants also recognized that creativity, innovation, and adaptability were necessary for sustaining business operations in competitive environments. Rather than viewing challenges as isolated obstacles, students began to understand them as integral components of entrepreneurial practice that require continuous reflection, strategic planning, and informed decision-making. These realizations contributed to a more realistic understanding of entrepreneurship, replacing idealized perceptions with practical awareness of the complexities involved in managing a business.

The findings complement the quantitative results presented in Table 4, where Financial Literacy received consistently high ratings across campuses. While the quantitative findings demonstrated competency in financial concepts, the qualitative narratives reveal how students developed a deeper appreciation of financial accountability by experiencing the consequences of operational decisions firsthand. Medina et al. (2024) similarly observed that authentic business experiences enhance students' understanding of managerial accountability by requiring them to make decisions with real operational implications. Thus, the cafeteria experience fostered not only business knowledge but also responsible entrepreneurial thinking grounded in practical experience.

Theme 12. Increased Motivation and Confidence Toward Entrepreneurship

Participants consistently expressed that cafeteria participation strengthened their interest in pursuing entrepreneurial opportunities by demonstrating that business ownership was both attainable and personally meaningful. Students described the experience as an "eye-opener" that encouraged them to consider establishing their own businesses in the future while appreciating the value of entrepreneurship as a potential career pathway.

Interestingly, these qualitative findings provide important context for the quantitative results presented in Table 3. Although students rated Entrepreneurial Skills highly overall, the statement related to confidence in starting a small business received the lowest mean within the entrepreneurial competency domain. This apparent discrepancy suggests that while participants developed strong entrepreneurial intentions and positive attitudes toward business ownership, many continued to recognize the complexity and risks associated with establishing an independent enterprise. In other words, the cafeteria experience appeared to strengthen entrepreneurial motivation before fully developing entrepreneurial self-efficacy.

This distinction is consistent with entrepreneurship education literature, which differentiates entrepreneurial intention from entrepreneurial confidence. Authentic business experiences often inspire learners to consider entrepreneurial careers while simultaneously increasing their awareness of the knowledge, preparation, financial resources, and managerial competencies required for successful business ownership. Rather than representing a contradiction, the qualitative and quantitative findings complement one another by illustrating different stages of entrepreneurial development.

The participants' narratives indicate that experiential learning successfully cultivated entrepreneurial aspirations while encouraging realistic self-assessment regarding business readiness. Such awareness is beneficial because it motivates continuous learning and professional development rather than creating unwarranted confidence. Consistent with Agustini et al. (2022), experiential entrepreneurship programs strengthen students' entrepreneurial motivation by exposing them to authentic business environments where they can envision future

entrepreneurial roles while recognizing the competencies still requiring further development. Collectively, these findings suggest that the School Food Service Management program effectively nurtured entrepreneurial interest while promoting reflective and responsible attitudes toward future business ownership.

Students' Recommendations for Improving the School Food Service Management Program

The participants proposed several recommendations to strengthen the implementation of the School Food Service Management program. Their suggestions extended beyond improving daily cafeteria operations and highlighted broader institutional concerns related to facilities, operational planning, student preparation, and communication. Four themes emerged from the analysis: (1) Improvement of Facilities and Operational Resources, (2) Better Planning, Scheduling, and Organization, (3) Enhancement of Training and Operational Guidance, and (4) Strengthening Teamwork, Communication, and Student Support.

Theme 13. Improvement of Facilities and Operational Resources

Participants consistently identified the improvement of physical facilities and operational resources as the highest institutional priority for strengthening the School Food Service Management program. Their recommendations emphasized the need for dedicated kitchens, accessible sinks, adequate water supply, appropriate storage facilities, and complete food preparation equipment. Rather than representing isolated requests for convenience, these recommendations reflect students' recognition that learning environments should adequately support both instructional objectives and industry standards for food service operations.

The recommendations further indicate that experiential learning is influenced not only by curriculum design but also by the quality of the physical learning environment. Appropriate facilities allow students to practice food preparation, sanitation, storage, and operational procedures under conditions consistent with professional practice. Conversely, inadequate infrastructure may limit students' opportunities to perform required competencies efficiently while increasing operational risks associated with food safety and sanitation.

These findings also have important institutional implications. The financial performance reported in Table 10 demonstrates that cafeteria operations generated positive net income in both campuses, suggesting opportunities for strategic reinvestment into facility development and operational resources. Allocating a portion of generated revenues toward upgrading kitchen facilities, sanitation systems, food storage equipment, and instructional resources would further strengthen the cafeteria's role as a sustainable learning enterprise while improving the quality of experiential learning.

Accordingly, the participants' recommendations may be translated into institutional policy initiatives that prioritize infrastructure development, compliance with food safety standards, and continuous improvement of instructional facilities supporting BTLEd-Home Economics programs. Such initiatives would enhance both operational efficiency and educational quality while ensuring that experiential learning environments reflect contemporary industry expectations.

Theme 14. Better Planning, Scheduling, and Organization

Participants also emphasized the importance of strengthening operational planning and organizational systems to improve cafeteria implementation. Their recommendations extended beyond requests for additional time and highlighted the need for systematic scheduling, equitable workload distribution, organized task delegation, and improved operational coordination among students and faculty advisers.

These findings suggest that the effectiveness of experiential learning depends not only on authentic operational exposure but also on the organizational structures supporting student participation. Implementing structured operational frameworks—such as rotating duty schedules, block scheduling for cafeteria assignments, standardized workflow procedures, and clearly defined task rotations—may reduce scheduling conflicts while ensuring equitable learning opportunities for all participants. Likewise, advance operational planning meetings may help students anticipate resource requirements, coordinate responsibilities, and prepare contingency plans for periods of high customer demand.

For teacher education institutions, these organizational improvements mirror the planning and management responsibilities expected of future educators who coordinate laboratory activities, school projects, and learning

enterprises. Consequently, exposing students to systematic operational planning contributes not only to cafeteria efficiency but also to the development of organizational competencies transferable to future professional practice.

The findings therefore suggest that strengthening operational planning should become an institutional priority rather than an individual responsibility of students. Formal operational guidelines, standardized scheduling systems, and structured leadership assignments may improve learning quality while reducing unnecessary operational stress and scheduling conflicts.

Theme 15. Enhancement of Training and Operational Guidance

Participants consistently recommended additional training, operational orientation, and closer faculty supervision before and throughout cafeteria implementation. Their suggestions included workshops on food safety, customer service, financial management, communication, leadership, and operational procedures that would better prepare students for authentic workplace responsibilities.

Interestingly, these recommendations complement rather than contradict the quantitative findings presented in Tables 2, 3, and 4, where students reported high levels of competency in food production, entrepreneurial skills, and financial literacy. Although participants generally perceived themselves as competent in these areas, their qualitative responses indicate recognition that foundational competence does not eliminate the need for continuous professional development. Instead, students expressed a desire for advanced guidance that would enable them to manage increasingly complex operational situations with greater confidence and independence.

The participants' emphasis on stronger faculty guidance likewise reinforces the findings presented under Theme 3, where insufficient supervision emerged as an important operational concern. Effective experiential learning requires continuous mentoring, constructive feedback, and opportunities for guided reflection that help students connect operational experiences with professional competencies. Additional workshops, simulation exercises before actual operations, and scheduled mentoring sessions may therefore strengthen students' preparedness while reducing operational errors and improving learning outcomes.

These findings suggest that future implementation of the School Food Service Management program should adopt a developmental approach to training, wherein competency acquisition is supported through continuous instruction, mentoring, and reflective practice rather than relying solely on operational exposure. Such an approach is consistent with competency-based teacher education, which recognizes professional learning as an ongoing process requiring continuous refinement of knowledge, skills, and professional judgment.

Theme 16. Strengthening Teamwork, Communication, and Student Support

Participants also emphasized the need to strengthen communication systems, collaborative leadership, and student support mechanisms throughout cafeteria operations. Their recommendations extended beyond improving interpersonal relationships and highlighted the importance of establishing clear communication channels among students, faculty advisers, and operational leaders to minimize misunderstandings and improve operational coordination.

The findings suggest that communication should be institutionalized through structured leadership and support systems rather than relying solely on informal interactions among participants. For example, assigning designated team leaders, conducting pre-operation briefings, implementing daily task coordination meetings, and organizing post-operation reflection sessions may facilitate clearer communication, improve accountability, and provide timely opportunities for addressing operational concerns. Likewise, establishing defined communication protocols between faculty advisers and student leaders may strengthen supervision while encouraging collaborative decision-making during cafeteria operations.

Such recommendations are particularly relevant for BTLEd-Home Economics programs because future Technology and Livelihood Education teachers are expected to demonstrate effective instructional leadership, coordinate practical learning activities, and facilitate collaborative work among students and colleagues. Developing structured communication practices during cafeteria operations therefore contributes directly to students' preparation for educational leadership roles.

Collectively, the participants' recommendations underscore the importance of creating supportive learning environments characterized by effective leadership, collaborative problem-solving, and open communication. Strengthening these organizational practices may enhance both the operational effectiveness of the cafeteria and the overall quality of students' experiential learning.

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

The integration of the quantitative and qualitative findings demonstrates strong complementarity regarding the effectiveness of the School Food Service Management program as an experiential learning platform for BTLEd-Home Economics students. Quantitative results revealed consistently high levels of competency across food production, managerial skills, entrepreneurial skills, financial literacy, and professional confidence, while the qualitative findings provided rich explanations of how these competencies were developed through authentic participation in cafeteria operations.

The qualitative findings substantially reinforced the quantitative evidence by illustrating that competency development resulted from students' active engagement in realistic workplace situations requiring communication, teamwork, financial management, customer service, problem-solving, and decision-making. These experiences explain why students reported high levels of professional confidence and managerial competence despite encountering operational difficulties. Consistent with Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, participants transformed authentic operational experiences into meaningful learning through reflection, adaptation, and continuous application of classroom knowledge within real workplace contexts.

The integration of findings also provides important insight into the entrepreneurial outcomes of the program. Quantitatively, students demonstrated strong entrepreneurial competencies, although confidence in independently starting a business received the lowest rating within that domain. Qualitatively, however, participants consistently expressed increased entrepreneurial motivation and stronger interest in future business ownership. Rather than representing contradictory findings, these results suggest that cafeteria participation strengthened entrepreneurial intention while simultaneously fostering realistic awareness of the competencies and responsibilities required to establish and sustain a business. The convergence of these findings reflects progressive entrepreneurial development characterized by growing interest accompanied by informed self-assessment.

Similarly, qualitative findings clarified several quantitative results concerning workplace readiness and operational competence. Although no significant differences were found between campuses in students' competency levels, participants from both campuses consistently identified similar operational challenges, including scheduling conflicts, inadequate facilities, heavy workloads, and limited operational resources. Despite these shared constraints, students demonstrated resilience, adaptability, collaborative problem-solving, and professional responsibility, suggesting that meaningful competency development occurred regardless of campus assignment. At the same time, these findings highlight institutional areas requiring continuous improvement to maximize learning quality and ensure safe, supportive experiential learning environments.

Overall, the integration of findings confirms that the School Food Service Management program functions as more than a laboratory requirement or operational activity. It serves as a comprehensive experiential learning environment where theoretical knowledge, technical competencies, entrepreneurial thinking, professional identity, and workplace readiness are developed simultaneously through authentic practice. Nevertheless, the findings also emphasize that sustaining the program's educational value requires continuous institutional investment in facilities, operational planning, faculty mentoring, and student support systems. Strengthening these areas will further enhance the program's capacity to prepare future Technology and Livelihood Education teachers who are not only technically competent but also professionally confident, entrepreneurial, and capable of leading school-based learning enterprises.

Conclusion

This study examined the school cafeteria as a learning enterprise among Bachelor of Technology and Livelihood Education major in Home Economics (BTLEd-HE) students across two campuses using a mixed-methods approach. The findings demonstrate that the School Food Service Management program effectively enhanced students' competencies in food production, management, entrepreneurship, financial literacy, and professional

confidence while fostering workplace readiness through authentic experiential learning. The school cafeteria functioned not merely as a food service facility but as an instructional environment where students integrated theoretical knowledge with practical experience, thereby strengthening both technical and professional competencies.

The study further established that students from both campuses achieved comparable competency levels despite differences in operational settings, indicating that meaningful experiential learning can be attained across varied instructional contexts. While the number of OJT hours was not significantly associated with competency development, the qualitative findings suggest that the quality of learning experiences, diversity of assigned responsibilities, faculty guidance, and collaborative engagement contributed more substantially to students' professional growth than the duration of exposure alone. Furthermore, the positive financial performance of the cafeteria operations demonstrates that school-based enterprises can simultaneously serve as sustainable operational units and effective instructional laboratories when supported by sound financial management and institutional commitment.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings also revealed that students developed resilience, adaptability, teamwork, problem-solving abilities, and entrepreneurial awareness despite operational challenges related to scheduling, facilities, workload, and resource limitations. These findings reinforce the value of experiential learning in preparing future Technology and Livelihood Education teachers by enabling them to apply classroom knowledge in authentic workplace settings while cultivating competencies essential for professional practice, instructional leadership, and entrepreneurial endeavors.

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on experiential learning by conceptualizing the school cafeteria as a learning enterprise that simultaneously promotes competency development and financial sustainability within teacher education. By integrating students' competencies, operational experiences, financial performance, and lived experiences through a mixed-methods design, the study provides a more comprehensive understanding of how school-based enterprises can support competency-based instruction and entrepreneurial learning in higher education.

The findings have important implications for curriculum development, institutional practice, and educational policy. Higher education institutions offering BTLEd-HE and related programs should strengthen experiential learning through adequate facilities, structured operational planning, continuous faculty mentoring, and industry-aligned learning experiences. Institutional investments in these areas will enhance both learning quality and operational sustainability while providing students with authentic opportunities to develop professional competence. Ultimately, the study affirms that well-managed school-based enterprises are valuable instructional models that prepare future educators to become technically competent, reflective practitioners, and entrepreneurial professionals capable of responding to the evolving demands of education and industry.

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Conflict of Interests

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